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**Dynamic Typicality**

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*Published in:*

Sergei M. Eisenstein: Notes for a General History of Cinema

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Geil, A. (2016). Dynamic Typicality. In N. Kleiman, & A. Somaini (Eds.), Sergei M. Eisenstein: Notes for a General History of Cinema (pp. 333-346). (Film Theory in Media History). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

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# 7. Dynamic Typicality

Abe Geil

Eisenstein references his famous method of *typage* (*tipazh*) just once in his *Notes for a General History of Cinema*. With an anachronistic juxtaposition of the sort that pervades these texts, Eisenstein marks “a direct transition” from the “enthusiasm for an element of *crudité*” found in Degas’s paintings of bathing women to “the aesthetics’ of *typage* in all its ‘unattractiveness.’”<sup>1</sup> If the *Notes* appear to have nothing more to say about *typage per se*, it is worth recalling that for Eisenstein the significance of *typage* exceeds its narrow definition as a technique for casting nonactors as social types. As he insists elsewhere, there is a *typage* of plot as well as character, which signifies both the internal unity of a film’s overall construction and the typicality of the events it portrays. In its broadest register, *typage* is nothing less than “the signifier of the entire construction obtaining at a particular period.”<sup>2</sup> Approached in this way, as a mode of *typicality*, the underlying operation of *typage* can be seen to play a pervasive role in the *Notes* and in Eisenstein’s thought generally. Insofar as its task is to make a single member of a social class or occupation stand for the whole, *typage* is a paradigmatic instance of *pars pro toto* (the part for the whole) – a concept central to Eisenstein’s later writings, including the *Notes*.

In this chapter, I attempt to trace a genetic link between the more narrow understanding of *typage* as device or method and this broader concept of *pars pro toto* in which it participates. Beginning with the aesthetic practices to which *typage* is most clearly indebted – *commedia dell’arte* and caricature – I examine how they share in the same basic operation of *typicality*: the construction of a juncture between the general and the particular in a single depiction. To clarify the force of this operation, I place it in contradistinction to two other modern strategies for producing types. The first of these counterexamples is drawn from the hostile political and cultural milieu in which Eisenstein increasingly found himself from the early 1930s onward; the second from the nineteenth-century confrontation between caricature and the positivist application of the protocinematic technique of composite photography. What distinguishes Eisenstein’s conception of *typage* from these other approaches to type is captured most concisely in the *Notes* with his oxymoronic formulation: “dynamic mummification.” By per-

forming the operation of making typical, typage for Eisenstein becomes a motor of change and becoming even as it utilizes the seemingly most static of forms.

## From Theater to Cinema: The Paradox of Infinite Types

“As soon as I crossed over into cinema, I threw myself into typage.”  
– Eisenstein, “Theatre and Cinema” (1934)<sup>3</sup>

Eisenstein never claimed typage as his exclusive invention. Like montage, it was a term in general circulation among Soviet filmmakers in the 1920s. In his periodizations of Soviet film history, Eisenstein consistently coupled typage with montage as one of the “general tendencies” of the first period (1924-1929). As he puts it, the device was “refracted differently” in the work of the period’s principle filmmakers: from Vertov’s “factographic” approach, to Kuleshov’s “model actor” (*naturshchik*), to Pudovkin’s scenario-based method.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Eisenstein was the name most closely associated with typage, and for a time, especially in the immediate wake of *Battleship Potëmkin*’s success, that association lent the device its greatest prestige.<sup>5</sup>

As a concept, however, typage has a peculiar status in Eisenstein’s theory. Unlike montage, which dominates his writing in the 1920s, it does not play a significant role in his major essays from this period, the very time when the device was so conspicuously present in his filmmaking. It seems to suffer from a presumption of theoretical self-evidence within Eisenstein’s writings (as well as the voluminous secondary literature) in a way that montage never has. Not until the early to mid-1930s do we find any extended discussions of typage, at which point Eisenstein treats it retrospectively rather than as an active element of his theory and practice. These retrospective accounts are at their most illuminating when he is describing his transition from the Proletkult theater to making his first film, *Strike* (1925). As Eisenstein tells it a decade hence, typage figures centrally in the story of his transition. In fact, the most elaborate discussion of typage appears in a 1934 lecture entitled “Theater and Cinema” for a course on direction at the State Institute of Cinematography (GIK, later VGIK), a lecture he delivered during the very time he was returning to theater after a ten-year hiatus.<sup>6</sup> Eisenstein describes his movement from theater to cinema in terms of an organic leap: at the moment when theater had reached its limit with Proletkult it “grew into” cinema. Along with montage, the primary path of that growth led directly from *commedia dell’arte* to typage: “It transpires that the most theatrical phenomenon, that is, the comedy of masks, is transformed into a feature of the maximal purity of cinema.”<sup>7</sup>

This transformation produces two remarkable changes. The first concerns how the audience recognizes character types. In *commedia dell’arte*, stock masks

present a “defined character passport” – stamped with stylized traits reinforced for the audience over years of repetition – which is recognized the moment it appears on stage.<sup>8</sup> A similar economy of recognition is at work in Eisenstein’s conception of cinematic typage. Which is why it is possible for typage to fulfill one of the basic criteria of a film “attraction” – its effects are calculable in advance – so that without making recourse to psychological expression or narrative development the filmmaker can “know that, when I present this face, the entire audience will know what is going on.”<sup>9</sup> The crucial difference is that the economy of recognition in typage derives from a horizon of experience unbounded by the conventions of theater or any other artistic tradition. “[I]n typage,” Eisenstein remarks, “you invariably present a particular audience with a face that expresses everything on the basis of social experience (and not only social but also biological experience).”<sup>10</sup> Unlike the form of habitual recognition that depends upon the audience’s familiarity with the stylizations of specific, finite characters in the comedy of masks, in cinematic typage it is possible to recognize a character one has never seen before because “the sum of their physiological features disposes us towards them in a particular way.”<sup>11</sup> Here Eisenstein simply passes over the question of precisely how this link between social and biological “experience” and the physiological features of a particular face is constituted.

The second change that accompanies the transformation of *commedia dell’arte* into typage is the counterpart, on the side of the image, to the expanded horizon of its recognition: whereas *commedia dell’arte* uses a set of seven or eight stock characters, typage in cinema works with a potentially infinite number. More than the simple crossing of a numerical threshold, such a transformation virtually defines the leap from quantity to quality. It begs the question of how a conception of type can persist in a domain of infinite characters. In the comedy of masks there is a one-to-one relationship between type and character that adheres in the stylization of the masks as an identity of content and form. Many of Eisenstein’s typage constructions, especially in the early films, continue to work in an analogous mode. The stylization of the fat capitalists in *Strike*, for example, with their top hats and cigars, reproduces more or less directly the types drawn by George Grosz in *The Face of the Ruling Class* (1921). Here the type is already constituted by a set of stylized traits that preexist and determine the selection of individual characters that conform to it. In other cases, however, Eisenstein presents entirely singular types. We might think, for example, of Marfa Lapkina in *The General Line* (Ill. 1, p. 336) or Stepok in *Bezhin Meadow* (Ill. 2, p. 336). In these cases, the operation appears reversed. It is as though Eisenstein’s act of selecting a face itself produces the type it is meant to represent. The copy produces its model. In this way, the problematic of typage is not just about deriving a potentially infinite number of characters from a finite set of types. Rather, it entails a notion of infinite types. How are we to understand such a paradoxical syntagm? Does cinematic typage somehow possess the capacity to convert any face into its

own singular yet immediately recognizable type, and if so, at what point in this process does the very logic of the type dissolve into sheer multiplicity?



Ill. 1 – Marfa Lapkina from the cream separator sequence in *The General Line* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1929).



Ill. 2 – Vitya Kartashov as Stepok in *Bezhin Meadow* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1937).

### Typage as Caricature

The prospect of infinite types is of course a political as well as an aesthetic problem, one linked with nineteenth-century urbanization and the historical emergence of “the masses” as new forms of mobility and circulation unmoored social appearances from accustomed identities. In *Une Fille d’Eve*, for example, Honoré de Balzac would bemoan this new world of “infinite nuances”: whereas “the

caste system gave each person a physiognomy which was more important than the individual; today the individual gets his physiognomy from himself.”<sup>12</sup> It was no coincidence that the art of caricature flourished in this social context. Much in the way that Balzac understood the literary vocation of his encyclopedic *La Comédie humaine*, caricature held out the promise of reestablishing the intelligibility of social types.<sup>13</sup> Long before Eisenstein encountered the comedy of masks in Meyerhold’s theater, he had an intense interest in the art of caricature – especially the nineteenth-century French caricaturists Grandville, Charles Philipon, André Gill, and, above all, Honoré Daumier<sup>14</sup> – and his conception of *typage* is equally if not more indebted to this tradition. At a formal level, the problem caricature responds to is the very gap that *typage* bridges between “character” and “type,” or individual and class, or, more abstractly yet, between the levels of particularity and generality. If caricature bridges this gap, it is not as a form of mediation but as a short-circuit. Theodor Adorno describes this operation in the work of Eisenstein’s beloved Daumier: “[H]e assigns a very special status to the concept of the type: in each image of the particular, as rendered in an outsize nose or a set of bony shoulders, an image of the general is to be captured at the same time.”<sup>15</sup> Likewise, *typage*’s work of making typical aims to directly produce in the image of an individual face – in all the “crudité” of its concrete particularity – the image of a type.

This idea of a direct transition from the particular to the general recurs at several key points in the *Notes* where Eisenstein marks a leap in the history of art from a stage of mimetic reproduction to a higher level of generalization. He describes this variously as the leap from the direct “reproduction” of an object or event to its “mummification,”<sup>16</sup> from “banal ‘copying’” to the “reconstruction of the principle of the structure of phenomena,”<sup>17</sup> and, with respect to photography and cinema specifically, from the “mechanical copy of reality” to “conscious photographic creation.”<sup>18</sup> This leap is integral to Eisenstein’s understanding of what it means to compose a *General History of Cinema*, not because it represents a settled stage of development, but, to the contrary, because it repeats itself throughout the history of art prior to cinema and again in the history of cinema itself. Moreover, it must repeat itself. For this movement is both progressive and regressive, returning to a previous moment of particularity at the same time as raising it to a higher level of generality.

The nature of that double movement brings us directly to the intimate link between *typage* and the principle of *pars pro toto* that I gestured toward at the outset of this chapter. In the *Notes*, Eisenstein suggests that in the course of its emergence in the history of art the principle of *pars pro toto* performs its own variation upon the leap we’ve just described. And it makes that leap again in the history of cinema where it emerges most conspicuously in the close-up. *Pars pro toto* first arises as what he calls “*pre-synecdoche*,” in which the part is simply “any one of all possible details.” Eisenstein’s example here is Griffith’s “informational

close-up,” an arbitrary element cut out of the spatial temporal whole and enlarged. In its next phase, *pars pro toto* accomplishes the transition to a fully realized synecdoche in which the detail now bears a necessary relation to the whole: it is “the typical one – as the only one substituting for the whole.”<sup>19</sup> Now the exemplar of *pars pro toto* is “our close-up,” found, for example, in the shot of the ship doctor’s pince-nez in *Battleship Potëmkin*. But here we must take care to avoid an easy conflation. Given the close association of the face with the close-up in the history of cinema, there is an obvious temptation to reduce *typage* to a mere function of the close-up. For Eisenstein, however, there is no necessary relation between *typage* and the close-up. It is simply that both participate in the logic of *pars pro toto*, whether independently or in concert. Just as the close-up did not originate with the invention of film, as Eisenstein famously insists, neither did *typage*.

When Eisenstein discusses *typage* as a matter of practical artistic judgment, he casts particularity and generality as the poles of “naturalism” and “conventionalism.” A *typage* construction will fail to bring its effect across if it errs too far in the direction of one pole or the other. At one extreme, it risks sinking into naturalist particularity and becoming “no more than a face, plain and simple, rather than a typical collective face.” At the other, it risks the “deadness” of repetition and generalization, passing “over into hieroglyphics” and losing its “pictorial effectivity.”<sup>20</sup> But this way of posing the problem is misleading inasmuch as it suggests that an effective *typage* construction requires splitting the difference between these poles, as if it were a matter of adding or subtracting a quantum of the natural here or the conventional there. To the contrary, the entire force of the notion of *infinite types* lies in short circuiting the middle-course resolution. In this respect, Eisenstein’s most incisive approach to *typage* – understood now as a paradigmatic instance of *pars pro toto* – is perhaps not to be found in his discussions of *typage* itself but, rather, in his famous doctrine of the juncture of opposites. As we’ve seen, the caricatural dimension of *typage* lies in a direct coincidence of the particular and the general – in its capacity to make “extremes meet.”<sup>21</sup>

### From “Living Man” to Image (*Obraz*)

If we accept that Eisenstein’s idea of typicality is best understood according to the juncture of opposites, what then should we make of the fact that Eisenstein’s remarks on *typage* in the early to mid-1930s do nevertheless stress the idea of balance? To begin with, the passage quoted above regarding the need for a balance between the vital particularity of “naturalism” and the generality of “conventionalism” needs to be considered carefully within the ideological context of its utterance. At that point, *typage* was thoroughly associated with the formalism that had been under assault in official Soviet culture since the late 1920s. In the

years leading up to the adoption of Socialist Realism as the official doctrine for Soviet cinema in 1935, the slogan of the “the living man” was one of the primary weapons by which that assault was carried out. Conceived and promoted by the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), this slogan took up the broadly vitalist theme of “life” overcoming the sterile intellectualism of “form,” concentrating it into a representational norm for the correct portrayal of socialist characters. Representing the “living man” in the work of art meant depicting a character’s vital attributes and particularities through an emphasis on psychology. And of course it was precisely such psychologism that the ideographic strategy of typage was designed to oppose in the first place. But if in 1929 Eisenstein could still publicly attack the “the living man” as the reactionary imposition of a “right-wing deviation” upon Soviet cinema,<sup>22</sup> by 1937 he is compelled in an official statement of self-criticism to adopt its vitalist terms in renouncing the typage tendencies that contributed to the “catastrophe” of *Bezhin Meadow*:

[I]n regard to the appearance of the cast. These were not living faces but masks: the ultimate generalization of “typicality” [tipichnost], as distinct from a real face. In their behavior, the emphasis was on stasis, where the static frozen face was like “the mask of a gesture” just as a mask was the ultimate generalization of a dead face.<sup>23</sup>

Yet this is only one side of the delicate operation of self-criticism that Eisenstein was compelled to perform. For just as it was possible in the view of the censors to err on the side of “dead” generalizations, it was equally incorrect to place too much emphasis on the particularity of life’s manifestations to the detriment of typicality. Thus Eisenstein also criticizes the central episode of *Bezhin Meadow* – a kulak father murdering his Young Pioneer son – for being “not in the least bit characteristic.” Even though the incident was taken from real life (“such things had happened”) it was nevertheless “not a typical episode. Quite the opposite: it is exceptional, unique and uncharacteristic.”<sup>24</sup>

Eisenstein’s balancing act in “The Mistakes of *Bezhin Meadow*” with regard to the problem of typicality can be understood as his attempt to manage a fundamental contradiction at play in the vitalist canon of Socialist Realism. According to Mikhail Iampolski, this canon attempted to enforce two incompatible normative demands: “On one hand, it fostered the attitude that life was to be maximally reflected in all its manifestations. But, on the other hand, emphasizing any element was perceived as elevating a part to the detriment of the whole, hence as a sign of formalism.”<sup>25</sup> What resulted was the impossible criterion of “perfect averageness [...] some ‘apothecaries’ weight’ of all components.”<sup>26</sup> This essentially untenable ideological demand for averageness, which led first to the valorization and later the denunciation of the “living man,” ultimately found resolution in a concept that was sufficiently vague to accommodate these



contradictions – the “image” (*obraz*). Originally a concept in religious art dating to the Byzantine tradition, Iampolski describes the recuperation of “image” (*obraz*) in the context of Socialist Realism as “an amorphous construct that combined aspects of typification and averageness with those of life’s elementary vitality.”<sup>27</sup> This doctrine of the “image” enabled the continuation of the contradictory ideal of an average or typical hero, a figure who incarnated the very best attributes of vitality while remaining entirely “within the bounds of the average, with all extremes blandly balanced.”<sup>28</sup>

From 1937 onward – after the denunciation and physical destruction of *Bezhin Meadow*, as well as his coerced letter of self-criticism – Eisenstein too adopted the “image” (*obraz*) as a central category in his writings. But whatever ideological cover the term’s vagueness may have provided, it is clear that Eisenstein’s explorations of the “image” carry forward and even sharpen his “formalist” interest in the problematic of typeface (albeit without using the term).<sup>29</sup> This is especially evident in his unfinished book *Montage*, composed of texts written largely between 1937 and 1940.<sup>30</sup> In these texts, Eisenstein explores the coexistence of what he calls “depiction” and the “generalizing image” across a stunning range of graphic forms. “I believe that it is in the existence of these two elements – the specific instance of depiction and the generalizing image which pervades it – that the implacability and the all-devouring force of artistic composition resides.”<sup>31</sup> This formulation of the “image” (*obraz*) captures the basic operation of caricature: the direct production of an image of the general in a depiction of the particular.

## Composite Photography as “Real Generalization”

While the ancient art of physiognomic caricature underwent a cultural resurgence during the nineteenth century in the context of social massification, it could hardly match the biopolitical utility of the new science of statistics when it came to the classification of populations. For the Victorian eugenicist Francis Galton, physiognomical classification would only ever rise to the level of positivistic knowledge exemplified by statistical analysis by purifying itself of the subjective distortions of caricature:

The physiognomical difference between different men being so numerous and small, it is impossible to measure and compare them each to each, and to discover by ordinary statistical methods the true physiognomy of a race. The usual way is to select individuals who are judged to be representative of the prevalent type, and to photograph them; but this method is not trustworthy, because the judgment itself is fallacious. It is swayed by exceptional and grotesque features more than by ordinary ones, and the portraits supposed to be typical are likely to be caricatures.<sup>32</sup>

Galton staked the superiority of his new anthropometric technique of composite photography upon its capacity to overcome precisely this propensity for caricature by extracting the element of human judgment altogether. The key lay in devising a procedural formalism that matched the technical automatism of the photographic medium. Galton's solution was to divide the total exposure time for a given composite by the number of facial images in the sample class of a given type out of which the composite was to be composed – mugshots of “male criminals,” for example (Ill. 3, p. 341).<sup>33</sup> The result, he claimed, was a new “pictorial statistics,” the equivalent “of those large statistical tables whose totals, divided by the number of cases and entered on the bottom line, are the averages.”<sup>34</sup> By uniting the iconic and indexical properties of photography with the statistical capacity for quantitative abstraction, Galton's composites would visualize types as “real generalizations, because they include the whole of the material under consideration.”<sup>35</sup> Even the characteristic blurring along the edges of these composites was claimed by Galton to increase their statistical precision by measuring “the tendency of individuals to deviate from the central type.”<sup>36</sup> Most importantly, that “central type” is brought into focused solidity by the repeated exposures of overlapping features. Thus the most abstract level of representation, statistical average, is pictured as entirely concrete, while the deviating blurs register the “ghost of a trace of individual peculiarities.”<sup>37</sup> Translated into the terms of Eisenstein's concept of the “image” (*obraz*), Galton's ideal of “real generalizations” expresses the dream of subsuming depiction into the line of generalization without a remainder – not the juncture but the fusion of opposites.



Ill. 3 – Composite Portrait of a Criminal Type (Francis Galton, 1897).

In effect, Galton promises nothing less than a technological fix for the paradox of infinite types: to square the circle by simultaneously preserving and averaging nature's empirical multiplicity. By redoubling the automatism of photography, his "real generalizations" purported to bridge the gap between a regime of visual differentiation (the mug shot as a means to identify specific individuals) and a regime of visual classification (the composite portrait as a means to establish general categories into which any number of individuals could be slotted). In actuality, that bridge is only accomplished by virtue of the transcendental taxonomy of quasinatural types that organized the photographs of particular faces into Galton's sample sets to begin with. This smuggling of a transcendental order into an ostensibly empirical demonstration is the basic operation by which physiognomy is converted into an object of positivist knowledge and set in contradiction to its disavowed other: physiognomy as caricature.

Eisenstein insists upon this same distinction but from the side of caricature and against positivist representation. In "Beyond the Shot" (1929), for example, he describes the expressive force produced by the disproportionate representation of facial features in portraits by the great eighteenth-century Japanese woodblock printmaker Tōshūsai Sharaku ("the Japanese Daumier"<sup>38</sup>) and compares it to a cinematic montage of incongruous shot scales. In both cases, the effect is not simple distortion or discontinuity. Rather, the depictive elements of the representation are subordinated to what Eisenstein calls (following Julius Kurth) a "semantic purpose": to embody in the image itself a standpoint toward the object it represents. Whereas Galton links caricature to human judgment as proof of the latter's faulty perception, Eisenstein elevates this link to an active principle of *tendentious* composition, and, in the name of this principle, he asserts that "[p]ositivist realism is by no means the correct form of perception." When he then turns to sharply criticize the demand for "actual (absolute) proportions" on the part of "positivist realism," he sees its will to correct figural distortion as the function of a social structure that seeks to negate *tendentiousness tout court*. As a demand for "subordination to the inviolable order of things," this tendency "returns periodically and unfailingly in periods when absolutism is in the ascendancy, replacing the expressiveness of antiquated disproportions with a regular 'ranking table' of officially designated harmony."<sup>39</sup>

This latter statement, aimed here against the antiformalist tendencies mounting in the official Soviet culture of 1929, could easily be applied retrospectively to Galton's idea of composite types as the modern corrective to the distortions of caricature or, for that matter, prospectively to the normative demand of Socialist Realism for the impossible balance of heroic typicality. What both of these doctrines share is an idealist commitment to the univocal relation between an essence and its phenomenal appearance, a relation that entails a conception of form as the causal expression of an immutable order. They cannot tolerate the distortion of a standpoint embodied in the form itself, not least because it threat-

ens to reverse the direction of causality, redounding upon the underlying order that it ought merely to express.

## Physiognomy as Self-Generalizing Form

From the beginning, Eisenstein found the prospect of reversing the causal order of essence and appearance virtually irresistible as an aesthetic operation. Evidence of that appeal can be seen, for example, in his embrace of various motor theories of cognition and emotion for his theory of attractions. Among the most influential proponents of these theories in the early twentieth century was William James. And in a very late essay written in same period as the *Notes*, Eisenstein recalls that during his time in the Proletkult theater he was “already aware of James’s famous formula that ‘we are not crying because we are sad; but we are sad because we are crying.’ I liked that formula first of all aesthetically, for its paradoxical quality.”<sup>40</sup> Eisenstein’s description here of his affinity for this Jamesian inversion returns us to the paradox of *typage* whereby the selection of an individual face precedes the general type it is meant to express.

As an illustration of how Eisenstein puts this inversion to work with respect to *typage*, consider his transformative appropriation of the tradition of physiognomy itself – a discourse that focalizes the expression of essence in the outward appearance in the face. In his speech to the All-Union Creative Conference of Soviet Filmworkers in 1935, Eisenstein combines an explicit rejection of the scientific validity of Lavater’s physiognomy with an affirmation of its artistic power. “We do not ascribe any scientific value to it objectively, and yet the moment we have to show a typical characterization of external appearance on a par with a three-dimensional depiction of the character, we start using faces in the same way as Lavater did.”<sup>41</sup> The discredited science of physiognomy can reemerge in art “where it is needed as an image,” as Eisenstein puts it, because the falsity of physiognomy as a science lay in its positing a univocal relation between essence and appearance. Once that relation is severed, the physiognomic appearances assume an autonomy of form that makes them available to art.

In *Montage*, Eisenstein describes more precisely how it is possible to appropriate physiognomy in this way. Physiognomic appearance depends upon what he calls a “reversed metaphor” which entails “a ‘figurative’ connection between mimicry and physiognomy. A person’s physiognomy generalizes, as it were, those mimetic features which are most peculiar to him. His habitual movements seem to be frozen in the permanent character mask of his face.”<sup>42</sup> It is crucial, however, not to interpret this as a naturalistic description. If you need an actor to play an old craftsman, Eisenstein tells his students at GIK, “you don’t go to a workshop and pick out the first craftsman who has been there since before the Revolution. Not at all.”<sup>43</sup> Rather, it is a matter of selecting a face in which that entire history of experience and expression appears as if it were congealed there. For Eisen-

stein, the efficacy of that selection is ultimately a question of artistic judgment. What matters for our purposes is the act of selection as a mode of judgment in the first instance as opposed to taking what he calls disparagingly a “naturalistic mug shot.” It is the leap between what he calls in the *Notes* the mere reproduction of reality and its “dynamic mummification.” Indeed, Eisenstein’s aesthetic appropriation of physiognomy as self-generalizing form recalls the fundamental dynamism at the heart of his conception of the “image” (*obraz*):

constituted as a generalization, as an aggregation of separate metaphors into a single whole: this is again not a process of formation; it is an end-product, but an end-product which, as it were, contains a swarm of potential dynamic (metaphoric) features that are ready to explode. It is the sort of immobility that is not inaction but the acme of dynamism.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to briefly consider how the idea of dynamic typicality I’ve attempted to elucidate might also shed light on Eisenstein’s idiosyncratic construction of a history of cinema in the *Notes*. As Antonio Somaini demonstrates in his introduction to this volume, the basic compositional principle at work here is *montage*. Somaini convincingly argues that by taking up montage as an “epistemic tool” invented by cinema itself for the exposition and analysis of its own history Eisenstein is able to produce a nonlinear history of cinema adequate to his understanding of the medium’s temporal complexity. To this fundamental insight into the centrality of montage for our understanding of the *Notes*, I would add only that its less illustrious sibling might have a supporting role to play. Typage, at its most basic level, involves a principle of selection (why this face among the multitude?) and, given the sheer capaciousness of what Eisenstein planned to include in his “general” history of cinema, the problem of selection is no small matter. Within a time scale spanning from petroglyphs to the most current developments in mid-twentieth-century film, there are a quasi-infinite number of possible examples available to be taken up as elements in a potential montage. And, if Eisenstein’s *Notes* prove anything, it is that there is nothing in the entire history of art, media, and technology that cannot in principle be compared to cinema. Once the selection is made and taken up, the accomplishment of montage is to produce out of the example’s contingency the necessity of typicality – a synecdoche in Eisenstein’s strong sense of a nonsubstitutable substitute for the whole.

But alongside the principle of montage, a more conventional logic of linear history is also present in the *Notes*. This is perhaps most evident in the various chronologies of inventions, such as the list of precinematic technologies that Eisenstein borrows directly from Lewis Mumford’s *Technics and Civilization*.<sup>45</sup> The

principle of typicality offers a way to think a relation in the *Notes* between these apparently incommensurable historical logics. When Eisenstein asserts, for example, that “drawn cinema precedes other types” he is referring at once to proto-cinematic apparatuses like the zoetrope that mechanically create the illusion of movement from still images and to the style of contour drawing exemplified for him by Disney’s animation.<sup>46</sup> But it is only in asserting the typicality of the latter, with its direct connection to the long history of animal epos, that the historically contingent invention of the zoetrope can assume a kind of retroactive necessity. It is this sense, that Eisenstein can “duly put [Disney] in the beginning” of the history of cinema, ahead of an apparatus invented some seventy years before Disney was born.<sup>47</sup> In fact, Eisenstein constructs one of his most extreme anachronisms in his luminous notes on Disney (written in the years just prior to the *Notes*) where he imagines Ovid plagiarizing Disney some two thousand years in advance. After rapturously describing the “literal metamorphosis” he sees embodied in Disney’s drawn animations, he insists that his choice of the term metamorphosis “is not a slip of the tongue, for in leafing through Ovid, several of his pages seem to be copied from Disney’s cartoons.”<sup>48</sup> Eisenstein’s method for constructing a history of cinema – one capable of producing the necessity for such an anachronism out of the conventionally static chronologies of artists and inventions – is perhaps best captured up in his own one-line summary of the *Metamorphoses*: “a direct protest against the standardly immutable.”<sup>49</sup>

